SLAVE TRADE AND REPARATION

Gorée Initiative

English Anglais Inglés

During the period 26th - 28th June 2001, a number of African historians, anthropologists, sociologists, politicians, journalists and other intellectuals as well as the representatives of African civil society organizations including women and youth associations met in Dakar (Senegal) upon invitation by North-South XXI together with the Inter-African Union for Human Rights (UIDH), Rencontre Africaine des Droits de l'Homme (RADDHO), CEDA and the African NGO Steering Committee for the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance. They have agreed to co-sponsor the following text, which is referred to as ***the Gorée Initiative***.

The Ongoing Process of Durban

At present, a number of local, sub-regional, regional and international meetings were held in Africa and other parts of the world in preparation for the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance scheduled to take place in Durban (South Africa) from 31st August to 7th September 2001.

A number of questions that underlay and affect the progress of contemporary society will be addressed at the Conference. The South and the North are required to come to terms with each other and proclaim a clear response on the nature and characteristics of the Slave Trade, which had destroyed the political, economic, social and cultural infrastructure of Africa for more than 4 centuries (XV to the XIX centuries). All textbooks written during that period should be reexamined to make sure that a correct account of the oppression, domination and exploitation of the African people is understood and that a radically new foundation can be introduced.

The co-sponsors of this initiative are engaged in the preparatory process for the World Conference with keen interest, and note the dysfunction that has characterized the ongoing process. In fact, we observe a sustained campaign of disinformation and pressure being exercised upon African states by some countries. This campaign clearly indicates the unwillingness of certain Northern superpowers to allow Africa to address the questions of the Slave Trade and reparation.

However, we welcome the success of the African Regional Conference held in Dakar (Senegal). We subscribe to the conclusions of the NGO Forum held in Dakar (January 2001) in preparation for the World Conference and which have fully taken into account the preoccupations of the African people and their civil society organizations. The Dakar Declaration reinforces the universal concepts of equality and non-discrimination and should imperatively be endorsed by the World Conference in Durban. The Gorée Initiative reaffirms these conclusions and intends to consolidate them.

Historical Manifestations of Racism

The reemerging contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, continue to be based on the ideology of racial and ethnic hierarchy. The principal foundation of slavery, the Slave Trade and colonialism are essentially based on supremacist claims which automatically incite the exploitation of man by man. These crimes have played a major role in consolidating racial discrimination against the African peoples and their descendants in the continent and in the Diaspora in the Americas, Europe and the Caribbean. African-Americans are prime victims of marginalization and discriminatory practice particularly by law enforcement agents and even the penal systems.
To legitimize their hegemony, the Northern superpowers that support transnational corporations - the only beneficiaries of globalization - pretend to be engaged in a process of self-criticism and accept the principles of reparation for the victims of genocide and crimes for which they recognize responsibility. The most remarkable example in this connection is the Holocaust. Does the recent recognition by the French and European Parliaments of the Slave Trade and the enslavement of Africans as crimes against humanity indicate a new orientation in this regard?

Globalisation and Discrimination

The international community should recognize that the Slave Trade and the enslavement of Africans as well as colonialism constitute crimes against humanity and that their continuing devastating effects on the African continent are aggravated by globalization.

The Black and Napoleonic Codes as well as present international law actually encourage the massive poverty that marks the African continent in the same way in which the African slaves captured, tied and forced to migrate to Europe and the Americas were marked with iron rods.

Africa today is in a situation divided by diverse social wounds and trauma that annihilate its development prospects. Poverty and misery that are ostentatiously increased and revived by policies of the World Bank, International

Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organization as well as the Paris, Rome and London financial Clubs are worsening. These institutions do not target the elimination of poverty and misery: unfortunately they have contributed to the impoverishment of Africa. Today, whether at the levels of infrastructure, transformation of raw material or the equitable share of revenue, a number of structural impediments undermine the right to self-determination of the African peoples.

Foreign Investment which favours and protects patents, intellectual property rights, and the so-called good governance or structural adjustment policies, is directly leading the African continent into a vicious circle of dependency.

Issues Raised by the Gorée Initiative

Africans and their allies will be in Durban (South Africa), the land of Nelson Mandela, Thabo Mbeki and the ANC, to qualify the Slave Trade and the enslavement of Africans as crimes against humanity and pave the way for reparation and reconciliation of peoples.

The Gorée Initiative intends to raise these issues together with the question of reparation for their victims in clear terms, and also to stimulate a factual perception of the current manifestations of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.

Acknowledgement

The world community should recognize that the Slave Trade and the enslavement of Africans as well as colonialism constitute crimes against humanity. The oblivion and forgetfulness which the oppressors are consciously promoting as well as the cautious neglect that vulgarize the exploitation of the African continent should be condemned in the strongest possible terms. Restoring dignity can only be achieved through recognition of the truth as well as justice and in the revival of a collective memory.

Reparation

The principle of just and fair reparation for the Slave Trade and enslavement of Africans is the usual result of the recognition of this crime. In this specific case, it is a crime against humanity which is an imprescriptible crime. The impunity that surrounds this issue has substantially victimized and tormented Africa and it is time to put an end to this victimization. Reparation should not be considered as a sanction, but rather as a step forward in reconciling the human family.

Cancellation of African Debt

In a unique somersault of rights and responsibilities, the centuries old debt that the Northern countries owed to the African people in the continent and in the Diaspora now favours the North and at present Africa has towards the North a huge financial debt. The African continent should not continue to pay the heavy legacy imposed on it by the slavery system, or to suffer the disastrous economic policies imposed on it by this system.

African Renaissance

The co-sponsors of the Gorée Initiative are convinced that the African just demand for reparation for the grave and massive crimes committed against the continent should solemnly be expressed and heeded in a historical moment of recognition by all those who participated in it. To escape responsibility will represent a loss of this unique opportunity that should be seized to put into practice - the human rights concepts advocated by the Western nations - and come out with concrete results that will meet the five centuries old aspirations of the African people for justice.

The co-sponsors of the Gorée Initiative appeal to all African leaders, especially at a time when the African Union has become a reality, that they will fulfill the aspirations of the African peoples, especially women and youth, by drawing on previous experience to lead us to the prosperity of tomorrow.

Nevertheless, it is the African civil society organizations and their allies everywhere in the world who are called upon to multiply their efforts, their militancy and their activism so that such suffering is not only buried and ended for ever, but also that it serve as a means to achieve a splendid ***African renaissance***.

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